UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTIETH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
31st meeting
held on
Friday, 17 November 1995
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 31st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. RATA (New Zealand)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)
(Chairman)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/50/SR.31
26 January 1996
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

95-82356 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Tshering (Bhutan), Mr. Rata (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/38, A/50/110, A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/257/Rev.1-E/1995/61/Rev.1, A/50/346, A/50/378, A/50/398, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/538, A/50/691, A/50/747-E/1995/126; A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued) (A/50/744)

1. Mr. LEUNG (Fiji) said that his delegation had welcomed the holding of the Beijing Conference and the formulation of a Platform for Action, which reflected the interest of the international community in the advancement of women and their fundamental rights. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the Platform as an end in itself. His delegation believed that it would be for national Governments, in collaboration with partners in the international community and the United Nations system, to move from the level of political rhetoric to practical action in order to implement the commitments made at Beijing. That would require, in addition to real political will and specific measures, solid leadership not only at the national and international levels but also from the United Nations.

2. For Fiji, the immediate national priorities included the development of economic projects for women, efforts to address the issue of violence against women, a review of legislation which discriminated against women, an increase in the participation of women in decision-making, and the mainstreaming of gender concerns into sectoral policies.

3. Fiji had begun the process of considering the implementation of the Platform for Action at the national level, and a consultation between the Government and non-governmental organizations would be held in 1996. The consultation process would also be aimed at identifying specific roles for the various sectoral ministries, departments and non-governmental organizations. Donor agencies would have a vital role to play in the process, and international funding would be necessary to complement that available from public sector sources.

4. For a number of years, reproductive health care and services had been available to women regardless of marital status. In education, the girl child had received special attention, and in the period between 1987 and 1991, 44 per cent of all scholarships available for higher education had been awarded to girls or women. In law reform, a number of important pieces of legislation were under active review with the objective of bringing about greater gender sensitivity and balance and eliminating outright discrimination.

5. Stressing the importance of chapter VI of annex II to the report of the Beijing Conference, he said that it was essential that adequate financial resources should be made available at the international level, particularly for

small island developing States which had only limited economic capacities, for the implementation of the Platform for Action. In that regard, the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the regional development banks must re-examine their grant and lending policies to make them more gender-sensitive.

6. Observers and other parties concerned were often taken aback at the plethora of bodies within the United Nations system which dealt with women's issues. Like many other countries, Fiji believed that it was time to rationalize the activities of the United Nations system with a view to achieving greater and more effective coordination between the different bodies. Their programmes, budgets and activities should be reviewed in order to make optimum use of their resources and to do away with waste and duplication.

7. Mrs. TOMIČ (Slovenia) said that her delegation was pleased to note that the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference assured the protection of the fundamental rights of women and reaffirmed that women had the right to decide on matters relating to their sexuality, including reproductive health. Her delegation believed that the right to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, although not specifically mentioned in the document, should also be respected as a fundamental right. It was pleased that the Platform proposed specific action to promote the access of women to decision-making, economic independence and education.

8. Her delegation was convinced that, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Platform for Action, specific and positive policies must be formulated and applied at the national level. To that end, the Slovene national institution for the advancement of women would assess the results of the Beijing Conference, in collaboration with all the relevant actors, including grass-roots organizations and the private sector, in order to determine how best to improve the status of women in Slovenia.

9. In that context, it was of the utmost importance that national strategies and plans for the implementation of the Platform for Action should be prepared - if possible by the end of 1996 - since that would allow for an assessment to be made of the initial phase of implementation in different countries and for a comparison of different national experiences with regard to the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

10. At the international level, her delegation fully supported the commitment of the United Nations to incorporate gender-related concerns into all the programmes and policies of its organizations and agencies. For that purpose, the role of the Division for the Advancement of Women would have to be reassessed and strengthened in order to increase its effectiveness as a focal point. Her delegation particularly supported the proposed establishment of an inter-agency task force on the empowerment and the advancement of women, as mentioned in paragraph 38 of the report in document A/50/744.

11. Her delegation believed that the Commission on the Status of Women should be the central intergovernmental body for the substantive follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and that its mandate needed to be reviewed and strengthened and brought

into synergy with other functional commissions. Its level of expertise should be improved and, accordingly, its human and financial resources should be increased.

12. Her delegation believed that the Economic and Social Council was the most appropriate forum in which the substantive and effective coordination of all functional commissions could be achieved. It therefore fully supported the idea of holding each year, during the coordination segment, a review of cross-cutting themes of different conferences.

13. Her delegation attached particular importance to the full enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men. It was therefore pleased with the large number of ratifications of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to date, and called upon States which had not yet done so to accede to the Convention.

14. Her delegation supported the decision taken by the States Parties, in May 1995, to amend article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention in order to allow the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women sufficient meeting time, and it hoped that the amendment would soon enter into force. Her delegation also supported moves for an additional optional protocol to the Convention which would provide for the right of individual and collective appeal.

15. Ms. WAHBI (Sudan) noted that respect for women was inseparable from respect for any human being, and that women played an active role in all aspects of life in the Sudan. The human being lay at the heart of the tolerant principles which governed the organization of Sudanese society and which made no distinctions of race or gender.

16. In that context, Sudanese legislation had endeavoured to guarantee women respect for all their basic rights, such as the right to work, equal pay, and the right to vote, and to be eligible for office. The 1971 law specified that 25 per cent of seats on local councils, as well as a certain number of seats in popular assemblies, should be reserved for women. Many women also held important positions in local government, universities, the police and the Supreme Court, and they certainly played a significant role in all rural activities.

17. Furthermore, labour law recognized women's rights as wives and bread-winners, thereby giving them the opportunity to benefit, in particular, from maternity leave and generous welfare provisions. The financial independence of women was guaranteed by the Shariah: they had access to the same facilities as men and could acquire and own land. They were given broad access to education and represented 60 per cent of the total number of students.

18. On account of the traditional and religious values, violence against women was an unknown phenomenon in Sudanese society. Nevertheless, the Sudan firmly supported the measures aimed at protecting women against all forms of personal violence.

19. In order to implement those policies and achieve the objectives of the advancement of women, the Sudan had put mechanisms in place at the ministerial and trade union levels. The Government was also collaborating with the country's 145 non-governmental organizations, 17 of which were specifically concerned with women's affairs.

20. With regard to international organizations and the United Nations, in particular, the Sudan had taken careful note of the report on the activities of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (A/50/538), the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (A/50/410) and the note concerning the merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM (A/50/747). She paid tribute to the Institute for the efforts it had made in the fields of research, training and information for the advancement of women and welcomed the programme worked out by UNIFEM to safeguard the condition of women and reinforce their role in society. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the important role played by those two bodies and fully supported the strengthening which would permit them to carry out their mandate efficiently.

21. Her delegation, which was concerned that the commitments undertaken during the Conference should be honoured and the objectives of the Platform for Action should be achieved, stressed that the United Nations and its bodies should apply to the letter the recommendations laid out in the Platform for Action. She noted that the Secretary-General's first responsibility was to provide the resources necessary in that regard.

22. In order for the report of the Beijing Conference (A/CONF.177/20) to be complete and reflect the points of view of all, it should take into account the verbal reservations made by various countries. The Platform for Action must take into account the cultural, social and economic characteristics of those countries, as well as their religions, values, customs and tradition, so that the activities under it would be practical and effective at the regional level.

23. Mr. HAMIDA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had been the last in a series of international conferences that had provided an opportunity to view the current global situation in a new light and to conclude that there would be no stability or prosperity in the world as long as the existing inequalities between a handful of rich countries and the majority of countries which were prey to poverty and underdevelopment, and, in each country, between a rich minority and a poor majority which did not have access to social and economic progress, persisted. Furthermore, the poverty which affected more than a billion people in the developing countries, particularly in Africa, conflicts with their droves of refugees, and violence were socially destabilizing factors inasmuch as women and, consequently, their children and their families were the first victims. If all those conditions, which were currently unacceptable and flouted the dignity of the human being, were to be eradicated, it was essential to create a framework for social development founded on a spirit of cooperation and participation which would take into account the cultural, historical, religious and economic characteristics and the priorities for social development of each country.

24. The advancement of women was among the first national and international priorities and was inextricably linked to a society or community of which women were full members.

25. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should begin at the beginning, in infancy, and be carried through at all stages of life, because the family, as the basic unit of society, was the framework best suited to the promotion of equality and justice between men and women with respect for human dignity and the full and complete participation of both sexes in all spheres. International cooperation should also be strengthened in order to benefit developing countries, particularly in Africa, and to help those countries to escape from the vicious circle of underdevelopment which impeded equality and the participation of women. An international political climate should be created, founded upon the respect of all States for the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the rejection of hegemony and force embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

26. His delegation reaffirmed that, like the Beijing Platform for Action, it was opposed to any unilateral measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impeded the full achievement of economic and social development by the population of the affected countries, in particular women and children, and that food and medicine must not be used as a tool for political pressure. Libyan women had, over a relatively short period of time, made important gains in the fields of health, education, the economy and participation in decision-making at all levels, thanks to a legislative framework which gave them the same rights as men and did not tolerate any discrimination. Unfortunately, all those gains were threatened. The unjust sanctions regime imposed by the Powers which occupied a dominant position in the United Nations, and in the Security Council in particular, had claimed many victims and inflicted a great deal of suffering on the whole Libyan people, as a result of the scarcity of medicines, medical equipment and staff, foodstuffs and other basic necessities. In order to put an end to such situations, which caused suffering to the women of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and other countries, the current international order, founded on violence, injustice, force and hegemony, should be replaced by an international order which would give priority to respect for the human being, and would place the dignity of the human being above any other consideration. Only then would women become complete and whole human beings.

27. Mrs. ALMAO (New Zealand) said that the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing was an agenda for the empowerment of women throughout the world, which specified the action to be taken, the means to be used and the actors responsible for implementation. The challenge now was to put the Platform into action. In that respect, it was worth recalling that, while Governments were primarily responsible for the implementation of the Platform for Action, everybody was accountable for its implementation. The United Nations had an obligation to review and strengthen mechanisms dealing with women's issues, to ensure that women's concerns were fully integrated into all aspects of United Nations activities, and to ensure system-wide coordination of efforts to promote the advancement of women. Fundamental change was long overdue in the United Nations system if women were to be heard in all international forums.

28. New Zealand welcomed the decision of the Secretary-General to create a stronger and better coordinated programme for the advancement of women. It also noted that the Secretary-General intended to establish a high-level board to advise on follow-up to the Beijing Conference, and an inter-agency task force to ensure coordinated implementation of the Platform for Action. New Zealand believed that other initiatives should be taken to strengthen the institutional capacity of the United Nations, including a review of the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, which should enable it to play a central role within the United Nations system in monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action, and the reassessment of the functions of the Division for the Advancement of Women. It was deplorable that the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which played a vital role in advancing the status of women, was unable to carry out its work effectively because of underresourcing and the fact that certain States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had failed to meet their reporting obligations. New Zealand hoped that, following the Beijing Conference, more countries would ratify the Convention, that there would be improvements in the substantive services provided to the Committee, and that the States parties would do more to meet their obligations.

29. New Zealand was working to implement the commitments it had undertaken at the Beijing Conference. On the basis of the Platform for Action, the Ministry of Women's Affairs had developed a new strategy aimed at addressing more directly the underlying causes of gender inequities. It was developing ways to assist public and private bodies in undertaking gender analysis, so that policies or programmes could be adopted which would take account of the diversity of women's situations in New Zealand.

30. In view of the importance it attached to the protection and enhancement of the position of indigenous women, her Government was pleased to note that the Platform for Action emphasized the unique contribution of indigenous women in each of the critical areas of concern. New Zealand would consider the experience and views of Maori women when drawing up national policies on issues affecting Maori women and their families. Lastly, it paid tribute to the significant role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in New Zealand and elsewhere in the preparation for and work of the Beijing Conference. The continued and active participation of NGOs would be vital to the successful implementation of the Platform for Action. Governments should not forget that NGOs would monitor closely national and international follow-up to the commitments entered into at Beijing, and that they would not hesitate to call Governments to account.

31. Mrs. SMOLCIC (Uruguay) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had been part of a major movement aimed at guaranteeing the fundamental rights and freedoms of women at all stages of their lives. The Declaration and Platform for Action had reflected a political desire to attain the goals of equality, development and peace before the end of the century. With regard to the implementation of the Platform for Action, Uruguay attached particular importance to clarifying the existing legal norms regarding the protection of women's rights, so as to close the gap between those rights and de facto discrimination. Account must also be taken of the recommendations made by other recent United Nations conferences, in that the advancement of women should be

seen as part of a larger whole, linked to issues of development, the environment and population. To that end, the Commission on the Status of Women should be strengthened.

32. In order to improve the condition of women, Uruguay had committed itself to a plan of action which would seek to alleviate the effects of poverty, by creating jobs and offering training, particularly to the most disadvantaged groups; which would guarantee non-discriminatory education for all, helping women gain access to science and technology; which would grant universal access to health services and family planning by improving and coordinating private and public sector services; which would promote respect for the fundamental rights of women, and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women by reinforcing the relevant institutions and programmes; which would create systems allowing men and women to participate fully and equally in decision-making in all areas and at all levels; and which would inform and educate the public in order to create a collective will in favour of respect for the fundamental rights of women.

33. Mr. Tshering (Bhutan) took the Chair.

34. Mrs. MSUYA (United Republic of Tanzania) expressed reservations regarding three key proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace" (A/50/744) which related to the creation of a special inter-agency task force, the proposed appointment of a Senior Adviser in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to carry out the work described in paragraph 56 of the report, and the setting up of a high-level board for the advancement of women, to advise him on follow-up to the Conference. Those proposals might only add a further layer of bureaucracy and give rise to additional costs, contrary to the letter and spirit of the Beijing Conference. It was difficult to see how the Secretary-General could meet the cost of the proposed high-level advisory board, while citing budgetary constraints as the reason for deciding not to create a high-level post for the Adviser on women's questions, which the Platform for Action had envisaged. And yet, following the World Conference on Human Rights, in Vienna, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had been set up. Member States of the United Nations had a right to expect the Organization to play an important role in the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted after long discussions at the Beijing Conference. There was a need for further consultation in order to examine the Secretary-General's proposals, in line with the decisions taken and the commitments entered into at Beijing.

35. Mr. KHRYSKOV (Russian Federation) said that the interests of all regional groups should be balanced in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, even if that required considerable effort and compromise. The Russian Federation welcomed the call made in paragraph 356 of the Platform for Action, for organizations and bodies within the United Nations system, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to help countries in transition to create and implement policies and programmes for the advancement of women. One way of translating those provisions into concrete action would be by holding

a regional conference of countries in transition. That idea had been raised at Beijing, and should be given due attention by the relevant organizations within the United Nations system. A regional conference could be preceded by various meetings of experts dealing with the most critical problems facing women during the transition to a market economy. Such a conference could perhaps also help other regions.

36. His Government had already adopted a series of measures to implement the decisions taken at the Beijing Conference, including setting up a coordination council to bring together representatives from the public sector and non-governmental organizations and developing a national strategy to advance the status of women, based on the provisions of the Platform for Action. The Russian experience could be of interest to other States as well.

37. His Government was convinced that successful social reform required the active participation of women in all areas of social life. In the Russian Federation the equality of the sexes was recognized by the constitution, women participated in social production and they had a high level of education; they had both professional and family lives and contributed, like men, to providing a stable family income. Society must make good use of their qualities and their potential as well as of their organizational and managerial talent.

38. His Government, as it had announced at the Beijing Conference, would continue to give priority to an active social policy and was committed to improving the status of Russian women. Russian legislation would have to be harmonized with international legal instruments. To that end, his Government intended to accede to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 156 concerning equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women workers: workers with family responsibilities. The Government was finalizing a group of measures, including legislative measures, to prevent violence against women and intended to draft a federal law on the prevention of violence within the family. It also intended to reduce maternal and infant death rates, to develop job opportunities for women and to increase cooperation between governmental and non-governmental women's organizations.

39. Mrs. KARINA (Latvia) expressed her delegation's full support for the statement made by the representative of the European Union. Member States were responsible for translating the Beijing Conference Platform for Action into reality, and her Government had given priority to creating a governmental structure for the advancement of women, improvement of social benefits for working mothers, amendment of the labour code so that either parent might take child-care leave, and development of gender differentiated statistics. In implementing its national programme for the promotion and protection of human rights, her Government had already opened, in July 1995, a State Human Rights Office responsible for the dissemination of information, the investigation of grievances and the promotion of public awareness of human rights. It was expected that the office would also assume stewardship of the implementation of human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Latvia had acceded in 1990. The national preparatory committee for the Beijing Conference, created in 1994, was currently drafting recommendations for national gender equality policy to be presented to the cabinet. Its work focused in particular on labour legislation,

health, and the integration of women into all spheres of public and private life. It would also continue to serve as an information centre on women's issues. Latvia wished to pay tribute to the non-governmental organizations which had helped it increase public awareness of the question of equality of the sexes. Her Government also welcomed the support of the Nordic countries and the close cooperation which existed between the Baltic and Nordic countries in the areas of women's rights. As a country in transition, her country was aware that it must persevere in the path of sustainable and balanced development. She expressed her satisfaction with the catalytic role played by the Beijing Conference in promoting greater interest in women's issues in her country. Her Government fully supported the efforts to be undertaken by the United Nations to ensure effective follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, and committed itself to doing everything possible to implement that Platform at the national level.

40. Mr. SHEWEIREB (United Arab Emirates) expressed his delegation's disappointment at the decline in the status of women in several countries, caused notably by military conflicts, worsening of the economic situation and deterioration of the environment, which hindered the implementation of development programmes. The international community must therefore endeavour to give women the means to accomplish their duties, as had been recommended during the international conferences on women's issues. The United Nations must support developing countries, in particular the poorest countries, in their economic and social development efforts. The United Arab Emirates regarded improving the status of women as a priority and a strategic goal, in accordance with the Constitution of the country and with other legal texts which provided for equality and social justice, without any prejudice, in accordance with the principle that there could be no sustainable development without the cooperation of women. The wife of the Head of State had herself played an active role in achieving the national objectives of giving women true equality of opportunity. Women had thus acquired a first-rank position, both in the country's development process and within the family and society in general. Meeting goals in the promotion of women's rights was dependent on a national commitment and on the manner in which a State implemented the directives of the international community. His Government had worked to transform the traditional role of women, who henceforth would participate in the development of the country side by side with men.

41. Turning to the workplace, he pointed out that in 1980 women, who were then 31 per cent of the total population, had accounted for only 5.3 per cent of the workforce. In 1990, that proportion had grown to 16.3 per cent, which might seem low compared to the developed countries, but was a great success for a country which had managed to preserve its culture and its traditions. In the educational field, the number of women and girls in school had tripled over the preceding 10 years. At the university level, the number of female students had quadrupled and they currently represented 68.4 per cent of the total number of students. Women accounted for 54.3 per cent of the medical professions and were also well represented in the civil service, in ministries and in other social institutions

42. Women and children were the main victims of conflicts, violence, terrorism and human rights violations, especially in the occupied Arab and Palestinian

territories, in Somalia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His delegation therefore called on the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations to redouble their efforts to protect women and children in zones of conflict, to repair material, psychological, economic and health damage, and to support efforts undertaken to strengthen the role of women.

43. Mrs. LIMJUCO (Philippines), speaking first on behalf of the Group of 77 and of China, said that it was essential to maintain the integrity of the consensus achieved in Beijing and that additional resources must be mobilized to guarantee full implementation of the Platform for Action. She therefore suggested requesting the Secretary-General to submit a report detailing the human and financial resources necessary. Existing institutions for promoting women's issues at the national, regional and international levels should be strengthened, required to be accountable and committed to international standards of equality between men and women in all their work. While Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action, commitment at the highest political level was essential to establish and improve national machinery for the advancement of women which, in their turn, would be supported by regional and subregional structures. The existing United Nations machinery on women (the Division on the Advancement of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, INSTRAW, UNIFEM and the Commission on the Status of Women) should be able to rely on having the necessary human and financial resources. The Group of 77 and China therefore called for the coordinated strengthening of UNIFEM and INSTRAW, although they should remain separate entities. They also requested that the Secretary-General take specific measures to ensure effective system-wide coordination of activities. To that end, a high-level post should be established whose role would be to provide advice on women's issues and to help ensure system-wide implementation of the Platform for Action.

44. Speaking as representative of the Philippines, she said that on 11 September 1995, during the Conference, the Philippines had adopted the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development for the period 1995-2025. The Plan was a 30-year programme of action, formulated by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, which would control its implementation. Under the Plan all Government offices and Government-run corporations were enjoined to take appropriate steps in nation-building to ensure the full implementation of policies on the role of women as well as the fundamental equality of men and women before the law. The Plan also authorized the National Commission to issue circulars or guidelines on the implementation, coordination, assessment and updating of the Plan. Provision had already been made for it to be funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies and development assistance programmes. Her Government attributed great importance to the question of equality between men and women, which was enshrined in the national Constitution as well as in an act on the role of women in development and nation-building, since a partnership between men and women was a sine qua non for social and economic progress. Her Government also acknowledged the catalytic role of non-governmental organizations, and was committed to collaborating more closely with developing countries in the framework of the technical assistance programme of the Philippines on South-South cooperation.

45. Despite the progress made on the issue of the advancement of women, her Government was concerned by several other issues, such as the situation of rural women and women migrant workers and trafficking in women and children. Those issues had already been debated in the United Nations in the Third Committee, the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, but without producing satisfactory results. Her delegation therefore proposed that an expert group should be established on the question of violence against women migrant workers, in order to put an end to the abuses, harassment and exploitation of which they were victims.

46. Ms. CAMARA (Guinea) said that her delegation had studied with interest the various reports of the Secretary-General on the advancement of women and the report entitled "Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace" (A/50/744). Noting that a reading of the reports revealed that there were as yet few tangible results from the implementation of the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000), she recommended that the Secretary-General should continue to support efforts to place women in 50 per cent of posts subject to geographical distribution by the year 2000.

47. The Commission on the Status of Women was the only United Nations body dealing with women's issues as a whole, and her delegation therefore supported the idea of assigning to it the main role in the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and allocating to it sufficient financial and human resources to fulfil that role. She also supported the proposal mentioned in paragraph 54 of the report to establish a high level adviser's post. Furthermore, given the very important and complementary roles played by UNIFEM and INSTRAW in the advancement of women, her delegation requested that the Secretariat should not act on the proposal to merge those two bodies, as it was not persuaded that the results would be beneficial. Her delegation commended UNIFEM on its significant contribution in the field to the programme for integrating women into development, and continued to hope that its capacity for action would be strengthened during the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

48. In the Republic of Guinea, the advancement of women had always been considered a prerequisite for sustainable and balanced development. However, it was only in recent years that it had been possible to take real action to integrate women into development, after the liberalization of private initiatives had encouraged the emergence of many women's groups, cooperatives, associations and non-governmental organizations. Among the encouraging signs were the establishment in 1992 of a Junior Minister's Office for Social Affairs, the Advancement of Women and Children, which in 1994 had become the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Children; a significant increase in the number of women in government and decision-making positions; and the strengthening of the national preparatory committee for the Beijing Conference for the purpose of implementing the Conference's Platform for Action. However, significant challenges had still to be met if the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were to be implemented. Her delegation was very grateful to UNICEF for its support for Guinea in the implementation of its social development programme and particularly its long-term initiative to improve the status of women through the education of adolescent girls.

49. The Beijing Platform for Action could only be implemented if Governments had sufficient resources for that purpose. She pointed out that the developing countries, particularly in Africa, were in the throes of an unprecedented crisis as a result of their indebtedness and their need to implement structural adjustment programmes, and that millions of women and children were suffering from that situation, and she asked the international community to support their Governments in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

50. Ms. LOE (Norway) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had been a remarkable success in many respects. Contrary to what many had feared, the Conference had built on the achievements of previous summits and conferences and had succeeded in developing a comprehensive Platform for Action.

51. She reminded the Committee that Governments and the United Nations had agreed at the Conference that the full and equal enjoyment of all fundamental rights by women and girls should be a priority, and urged all States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women so that the Convention could be universally ratified by the year 2000. She also urged States parties to the Convention to reconsider their reservations limiting the scope of certain articles, or to withdraw them altogether, particularly those which ran counter to the purposes and objectives of the Convention. Her delegation supported the initiative of the Commission on the Status of Women to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the right of petition.

52. Although the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Beijing Conference was primarily the responsibility of Governments, the United Nations system still had an important role to play in the follow-up to the Conference, in particular, in supporting action taken at the national level. It was necessary therefore to ensure that it was in a position to discharge that role, by ensuring that it had sufficient financial and human resources available and used them effectively. As had been agreed in Beijing, there was a need to reform and revitalize various United Nations bodies if the United Nations system as a whole was to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly, since several major conferences and summits had already considered women's issues, follow-up to them should be coordinated with follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women at a system-wide level.

53. Her delegation welcomed the recent decision of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to set up three inter-agency task forces to address different aspects of follow-up to the Conference, in order to strengthen support at the country level. She also supported the proposal to establish a fourth task force on the empowerment and advancement of women.

54. United Nations mechanisms for the advancement of women must strengthen their advisory and monitoring functions to ensure that United Nations bodies and agencies took full account in all their programmes of the Organization's policies regarding women. Norway considered that those functions could be properly performed only through close cooperation among the various mechanisms and through close working relations with United Nations bodies and agencies. The merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM would be an important step in that direction.

55. For many years Norway had given high priority to promoting women in its development cooperation activities. Within the United Nations system Norway had supported such institutions as UNIFEM and INSTRAW as well as programmes aimed at integrating United Nations policies on women with the plans and programmes of institutions such as UNDP and the World Bank. The intention of the Government of Norway was to increase resources for those purposes, but it might have to redistribute resources to strengthen those programmes it considered most effective.

56. Norway was concerned at the fact that women continued to be underrepresented in the Secretariat, particularly at the higher decision-making levels, and expected to see a clear improvement in their situation in the near future.

57. Mr. FREEDMAN (International Labour Organization) said that the International Labour Organization (ILO) welcomed the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in particular with regard to labour-related issues. ILO was currently developing a policy for following up the achievements of the Conference based on three major principles: playing an active role within the United Nations system to redress the inequalities of which women were victims in the areas of employment, training and occupational safety and health, as set out in the Declaration and Platform for Action; taking account of its own programmes and activities relating to follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development in the field of employment; and involving a broad range of participants in all its activities through its constituents (Governments, employers and workers) in the framework of its field operations, since implementation of the Platform for Action would take place mainly at the national level. Keeping those basic principles in mind, ILO planned to follow up the Conference by implementing a global integrated strategy to enhance the situation of women and promote gender equality in the world of work.

58. Standard-setting and the promotion and protection of the rights of women workers were at the forefront of ILO's international activities. In direct relationship to the commitments undertaken at Beijing and at the World Summit for Social Development, ILO had proposed a strategy to encourage the ratification and implementation of conventions and recommendations in the following areas: equality of opportunity and treatment, employment, human resources development, industrial relations, conditions of work, occupational safety and health and social protection. Within that strategy, ILO intended to propose to its member States technical cooperation and training activities that would enable women better to understand their rights with regard to equality of opportunity and treatment in the world of work. ILO had also produced a training package and information kit on women workers' rights to stimulate the development and adoption of new international labour standards for women.

59. ILO's close links with employers' and workers' organizations added an important dimension to its efforts in assisting Governments to develop national follow-up strategies. ILO aimed, in the context of technical programmes implemented at the national level, to give women the means to play a more active economic role by organizing vocational training courses for them in areas traditionally reserved for men, by proposing various measures to develop their entrepreneurship and by organizing workshops to teach them to organize

themselves better vis-à-vis their employers and to negotiate better working conditions.

60. ILO planned to improve its methods of collecting statistics and developing labour market indicators that would enable it to identify areas in which women were the victims of inequalities. ILO was also designing an evaluation system for its follow-up activities to the Beijing Platform for Action. In conclusion, ILO noted that the goals set forth in the report of the Conference required the strengthening of the mechanisms for inter-agency collaboration, such as the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Group on Women, to facilitate a unified and coherent approach.

61. Mr. COUTTS (World Food Programme) said that 30 million of the 60 million people receiving food aid from the World Food Programme (WFP) were women. WFP was committed to coming to their assistance, and based itself on the premise that only by strengthening opportunities and options for women could the problems of hunger and poverty be solved. However, the progress of women was constrained by various inequalities which WFP, for its part, was determined to resolve through its interventions. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, the Executive Director of WFP had set out the tasks to which he was committed in order to ensure that relief and development aid delivered by WFP corresponded to the objectives of the Conference. To ensure that refugee and displaced women and girls had direct access to food and services provided, WFP would thenceforth be distributing food products directly to households, and preferably to the senior female in each household. If that proved to be impossible, the WFP country office or implementing partner would have to explain the reasons. WFP would identify the nutrient deficiencies of women and adolescents and, where necessary, would adjust its food aid accordingly.

62. WFP would allocate resources to food-for-work projects through supplies of direct interest to women. In countries where women were particularly disadvantaged, WFP would be committing 60 per cent of its programme resources to women and girls. To promote equal access by women to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, monitoring and reporting on WFP development and relief operations would detail the extent to which women participated in the work of local committees concerned with the management of food aid and the benefits they derived.

63. WFP had committed itself to adjusting its recruitment policy to ensure greater representation of women. To reach the target of 25 per cent which the Secretary-General had set for the representation of women in high-level posts, WFP would be hiring women for half of its senior management positions. As the Deputy to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management had told the Third Committee, WFP was one of the few agencies where rapid strides had been made in appointing women to D-1 and D-2 posts.

64. WFP would be collecting gender disaggregated data on the percentage share of total food aid distributed which went to women, the share of resources which women controlled and the percentage of women involved in food distribution.

65. Associating itself with statements made by other agencies, WFP underlined the importance of integrated and collaborative efforts at all levels to

strengthen the action of Governments and non-governmental organizations in meeting the objectives of the Platform for Action. In that spirit, WFP was working on the revision of the system-wide medium-term plan in the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Group on Women, which was meeting in parallel with the Third Committee. WFP considered that the plan offered agencies an excellent opportunity to collaborate in ensuring the effective and practical implementation of the Platform for Action at the national, regional and interregional levels.

66. WFP was aware of the difficulties of implementing the Platform for Action, and had set up a senior management task force to mobilize the necessary support and report on progress in achieving the objectives of the Platform. All field offices, all headquarters divisions and all WFP staff would be involved in the effort. WFP had also decided to assess every manager according to his or her progress in contributing to the achievement of the commitments set by WFP in relation to gender equality.

67. Mr. HAROUNA (Niger) said that his Government had always focused its economic and social development policy on the advancement of women since it was convinced that the citizens' welfare could not be improved without the full participation of women, who accounted for half of the population, in national development. A State Secretariat for Social Affairs and the Status of Women had therefore been established in 1987; in 1991 it had become the Ministry of Social Development, Population and the Advancement of Women. The aim of that Ministry was to enhance the legal and social status of women, improve the education and training of women and create more employment opportunities for them and prepare a draft family code. Since the education and health of women were an integral part of the Niger's policy, the Government had established health and education facilities (maternal and child welfare centres and family health centres for the education of women in the area of family planning and hygiene) in the major cities. It also gave functional literacy classes to illiterate women, particularly in the rural areas. Access to jobs was not subject to gender-based discrimination and remuneration was based on the principle of equal pay for equal work. In order to promote the economic activities of women who contributed to the growth of the gross national product, the Ministry of Social Development provided various kinds of assistance to women's associations and organizations, such as the Association des femmes du Niger and the Rassemblement démocratique des femmes du Niger, which were promoting the welfare of the women of the Niger, especially rural women.

68. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women had identified gender inequalities, Governments and the United Nations system must redouble their efforts to address that situation. His delegation supported the Secretariat's efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat and hoped that adequate resources would be allocated to the United Nations bodies responsible for the advancement of women.

69. Ms. KING (Deputy to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) thanked all the delegations which had made comments on the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/50/691) and had welcomed the initiatives of the Office of Human Resources Management to integrate gender issues into the retooled strategies for

human resources management, including the performance appraisal system, the search for qualified women outside the Secretariat and the collection of better data on mechanisms to create a work environment free from harassment, including sexual harassment, and to define policies on gender parity.

70. With regard to the concerns of the New Zealand delegation relating to the need to streamline and broaden grievance procedures, that issue was under close consideration by the Secretariat and was the subject of a Fifth Committee document on the professionalization of the justice system (A/C.5/50/2).

71. She also thanked the delegations and members of the United Nations common system who had repeatedly stressed how important it was for the secretariats to achieve 50 per cent representation of women at all levels, particularly the decision-making and policy-making levels. The report of the Secretary-General (A/50/691) covered the period that ended in June 1995; since then, the Secretary-General had achieved 34.4 per cent representation of women at all levels and 17.6 per cent (compared to 17.1 per cent in June) at the D-1 level and above. In other words, some progress had been made. She hoped that, despite the post reductions, underrepresented countries would continue to encourage qualified women to apply to all the secretariats of the common system, so that the United Nations could meet the target of 50 per cent women in posts subject to geographical distribution established in General Assembly resolution 49/167 and by so doing meet the concern of the Norwegian delegation, which had stated that the Secretariat would be judged on how well it implemented the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the number of women occupying posts of Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General. The Office of Human Resources Management would ensure that all secretariats were kept under pressure to meet those targets and, like the International Labour Organization and the World Food Programme, hoped that Member States would lend their support to the preparation of a system-wide medium-term plan to ensure that greater attention would be paid to women in human resources programming.

72. Mrs. MONGELLA (Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women) said that her mandate ended with the current session of the General Assembly and thanked the representatives of Member States for their cooperation, support and encouragement throughout the preparations for the Conference. Recalling that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had raised considerable expectations among all women and men who fervently desired development, peace and equality, she expressed the hope that its implementation would get off to a good start and that Governments would translate it into action.

73. The CHAIRMAN thanked Mrs. Mongella on behalf of the Committee and on his own behalf for having listened to the debate on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace and warmly congratulated her on the success of the Beijing Conference. He said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda items 107 and 165.

74. Ms. KLING (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the non-aligned countries, expressed concern that the report prepared by the Working Group on the Right to Development of the Commission on Human Rights on the deliberations of its recent session had still not been made available to delegations. Since the right to development was one of the burning issues among the non-aligned countries, she

hoped that the Chairman would inquire from the Secretariat when the report would be issued and would ensure that it was issued as soon as possible.

75. Ms. NEWELL (Secretary of the Committee), referring to the note by the Secretary-General on the right to development (A/50/729), said that, as had been decided by the Commission on Human Rights, the report of the Working Group on the Right to Development and all the other relevant documents would be made available to the General Assembly as part of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. It had been confirmed that those documents, which were listed in paragraph 4 of document A/50/729, would be made available to the Third Committee very soon through the Centre for Human Rights.

76. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Cuba), endorsing the statement made by the representative of Colombia, said that it was very important that the report of the Working Group should be issued promptly, since the non-aligned countries needed it to prepare a draft resolution on the right to development and to begin their consultations on that subject.

77. Ms. NAFRAH (Malaysia), Ms. MURUGESAN (India), Mr. YIE Cohua (China), Ms. BENNANI (Morocco) and Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) endorsed the statements of the representatives of Colombia and Cuba.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.